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## Formoterol and Pregnancy

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to formoterol can have during pregnancy. With each pregnancy, all women have a 3% to 5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

### ***What is formoterol?***

Formoterol (also called eformoterol) is a medication used for the treatment of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It is in a class of medications called  $\beta_2$ -agonists ( $\beta_2$ -agonists).  $\beta_2$ -agonists are bronchodilators, meaning that they help to open the airways in the lungs. Formoterol is a long-acting  $\beta_2$ -agonist taken by inhalation. It is used in combination with an inhaled corticosteroid for asthma treatment.

### ***I just found out that I am pregnant. Should I stop using my formoterol inhaler?***

No. You should not stop taking any medications without first talking with your doctor. It is important to consider the benefits of controlling asthma symptoms during pregnancy. Untreated asthma increases the risk for complications for both the mother and the baby. For more information about asthma in pregnancy, please see the OTIS fact sheet [Asthma and Pregnancy](#).

There is more experience with the use of other  $\beta_2$ -agonist bronchodilators, such as albuterol, during pregnancy. However, if a woman's asthma was well-controlled with formoterol prior to pregnancy, it is appropriate to continue its use during pregnancy.

### ***Does formoterol cross the placenta and get to the baby?***

When formoterol is inhaled very limited amounts of the drug enter the blood, and even less is expected to reach the developing baby. The amount reaching a developing baby is expected to be insignificant.

### ***Can taking formoterol during my pregnancy cause a birth defect?***

Limited data do not suggest an increased risk for birth defects with the use of inhaled formoterol during pregnancy. One report of 33 women who used formoterol during pregnancy described two children born with birth defects. The birth defects were unrelated and there is no indication that they were caused by formoterol. Another report, not published in detail, described 53 women who used a  $\beta_2$ -agonist (including formoterol) in pregnancy. No increased risk for harmful effects was reported. While data are limited, there is currently no evidence that formoterol use in pregnancy increases the risk for a birth defect.

### ***Can taking formoterol during pregnancy cause other pregnancy complications?***

One report of 33 women who used formoterol during pregnancy described five cases of premature birth (three would be expected due to a background risk). It is

unlikely that the risk for preterm delivery was increased by the use of formoterol during pregnancy. There may have been a relationship of preterm labor with poorly controlled or more severe asthma in pregnancy.

***Are there any other risks associated with formoterol use?***

Long-acting  $\beta_2$ -agonists, such as formoterol, may increase the risk for asthma related deaths when used long term. Therefore, they should be used for the shortest period of time to get the asthma under control. It is also recommended that a long-acting  $\beta_2$ -agonist only be used in combination with an asthma controller medication, such as an inhaled corticosteroid.

***Can I take formoterol while breastfeeding?***

Although there have not been any studies of women taking formoterol while breastfeeding, use of a formoterol inhaler is not expected to result in high enough levels in the mother's bloodstream to pass into breast milk in significant amounts. Inhaled bronchodilators are generally considered acceptable for use during breastfeeding.

***Is there a concern if my partner was taking formoterol when I got pregnant?***

There are currently no data to suggest paternal use of formoterol at the time of conception increases the risk for a birth defect. For more information about a father's exposures and pregnancy, please see the OTIS fact sheet [Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy](#).

***OTIS is currently conducting a [study looking at asthma and the medications used to treat asthma in pregnancy](#). If you are interested in taking part in this study, please call 1-877-311-8972.***

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**Selected References:**

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*If you have questions about the information on this fact sheet or other exposures during pregnancy, call **OTIS** at **1-866-626-6847**.*